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ABSTRACT

This review of recent and anticipated advances in library automation technology and methodology includes a review of the effects of OCLC, MARC formatting, AACR2, and increasing costs, as well as predictions of the impact on library technical processing of networking, expansion of automation, minicomputers, specialized reference services, and inflationary trends. Forecasts include an increase in technical qualifications for and a decrease in the number of technical processing librarians. Three references are listed. (RAA)

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CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE FORECASTS

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The decade just completed has been one of dramatic change in libraries and librarianship. From the frustrations of Proposition 13-based funding to the excitement of technological innovation, the seventies provided a full gamut of challenges for librarians.

Among the most revolutionary changes were those involving mechanization of operations. Libraries' technical departments were the early main arenas for this activity. Operational changes were infrequently accompanied by immediate personnel changes, therefore it seems logical to assume that the eighties will see the role of the technical processing librarian undergo some environmental adjustment and transformation.

Looking into the decade ahead, this paper will attempt to assess what the future holds for technical processing librarians. Before any credible predictions can be made, however, it is imperative to examine recent trends or developments that

form the bases for these predictions. Four prominent trends/ developments have been selected and although they constitute a far from exhaustive list, it is hoped that they will serve to support the author's forecasts.

The first, and perhaps most spectacular, of these developments has been the rise of library networking across the nation during the last several years. OCLC has become a household word and RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network) and WLN (Washington Library Network) are well on their way to that same status. These networks, along with the technological advances and cooperative spirit they have spawned, have touched all library operations but none so emphatically thus far as technical processing.

As an example of the impact of OCLC, Barbara Markuson, in a study done for Library Technology Reports, observed that 56 of 71 (74%) libraries queried reported organizational changes due to implementing OCLC. These changes included elimination of card typing units and realignment of other duties.

Peter Spyers-Duran conducted a survey in 1977 of some 130[1] medium to large academic libraries on the affect of automated cataloging on staff relations. 80% of the sample reported that cataloging work flows were reviewed prior to introducing OCLC. 80% of the group also reported a moderate to great change in the cataloging work enviromnent after automating. Though 70% of the respondents expressed the opinion that if shared cataloging reduces the need for original work, catalogers should be retrained for other professional activities, a much smaller percentage had

actually begun such retraining. This probably reflects uncertainty at that time about the long range effects of online cataloging.[2]

Clearly these studies reveal the significant impact of automation of cataloging--and networks have made possible the extension of automation to scores of libraries who would otherwise have been unable to develop such systems on their own. When we stop to consider that networking is still a relatively young and unrefined venture, we realize that its full impact is truly yet to come.

A second influential development is MARC, the machine readable cataloging format devised the the Library of Congress. MARC could be considered the cornerstone of networking for without the standardization it provides, exchange of automated bibliographic data files among libraries and networks would be difficult if not virtually impossible. The LC MARC records distributed on magnetic tape have become the core of network data bases and the recent addition of nonbook formats has ended restrictions on the type of material that can be cataloged online. Cooperative projects such as CONSER and COMARC also represent major undertakings of the last several years that have contributed bibliographic records to ever-growing data bases. LC's newly automated name and subject authority files are noteworthy developments which promise to be network enhancements.

A third trend with great import for the future of technical and public services in libraries is the change in cataloging rules

characterized by a move toward simplification and international standards. International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) and the second edition of the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR 2), though both the center of much controversy at present, are intended to clear the way for eventual networking beyond our national boundaries. The cause of the controversy over AACR 2 is not the concpt of international cooperation, but rather the extensive revisions and/or adjustments it will necessitate in libraries' catalogs. Features of the new cataloging code include drastically reduced use of corporate main entries and basic changes in the rules for selecting forms of names in headings. The latter revision presents the most troublesome prospects for technical processing, wherein traditionally lies the responsibility for resolution of all catalog-related problems. Widespread variations in name headings suggest extensive revision of huge files--an incomprehensible manual task in some libraries.

With AACR 2 as a catalyst the 'closing the card catalog bandwagon' is gaining momentum--with LC in the driver's seat. When LC closes its card catalog on January 2, 1981, so will a number of other libraries. They will not, however, be acting on simple follow-the-leader impulse. Many libraries, both large and small, have come to view the card catalog as a cumbersome tool and a maintenance horror--a time and money consuming expense that cannot be continued indefinitely. The onset of new cataloging rules which would require large scale revision in the card

catalog has provided a logical break off point for libraries which already decided to eventually close their card catalogs anyway.

The new catalogs either replacing or continuing closed or frozen card files may vary in type, but one popular heir apparent is the computer output microfilm version. Although the online catalog is the ultimate goal of most libraries, the COM catalog can serve as an interim step and continue to serve in a backup and economical remote access role when the online catalog becomes a reality.

A major switch in the format of the catalog could be viewed as a consideration primarily for the public services. However, it also constitutes a dramatic change in the product of cataloging's labor and the resulting effect on technical services, particularly catalog maintenance, will be significant as well.

Last, but far from least important, of the current trends is the spiraling cost of books and serials coupled with budget retrenchments for library collections. Barring a major economic reversal, it seems unlikely that the inflationary trend of recent years will be broken. Between 1949 and 1978, the average book rose in price over 400%.[3] Serial subscription rates have risen even more sharply. Tremendous financial supplements from unlikely funding sources would be essential just to hold pace with inflation, so it appears that libraries are going to see buying power continue to shrink in years ahead. The manifestation of this plight in technical services will be reduction, or at least

leveling off, or new purchases and forced resourcefulness in satisfying collection needs.

With the four aforementioned conditions as a foundation, several changes in technical processes and the role of the future technical processing librarian are envisioned.

Through the efforts and continued evoluation of networks, library automation will begin to come full circle in the eighties. Bibliographic data bases will have multiple uses for ordering, cataloging, and catalog and collection control and display. Features such as subject search and online authority control, now available to a minority of libraries in networks, will be offered more widely. If network utilities (such as OCLC) do not develop these capabilities for their members, regional networks moving toward autonomy may well pick up these projects.

Online acquisitions will be a welcome replacement for the current variety of batch process and manual systems, and again, this is a function that could be developed by network utilities, regional centers, or even commercial vendors. Several bookselling firms are already marketing online systems which are blatantly competitive with the network acquisitions modules still-in-development.

Serials librarians will have automated check-in, claiming, and binding operations. For libraries that have long been inconvenienced by stationary serials holdings records, remote access terminals will revolutionize service to that pert of their collections.

Many libraries will purchase minicomputers to support operations which rely largely on local, idiosyncratic data while allowing network centers to continue to support centralized data base access and standardized operations. The obvious example is circulation control where networks (e.g. OCLC and WLN) have announced their intentions to provide interfaces between their data bases and turnkey circulation systems to be supported by libraries' in-house minicomputers.

Although the totally integrated, automated library system may be further down the road, the 1980s will see clearer developmental plans and goals for networks. Librarians will need the know-how to successfully implement modules of the system as they become available.

By the mid-eighties libraries will be closing their card catalogs in increasing numbers. The catalysts for this action will AACR 2 and the availability of superior alternatives to card catalogs which, by that time, will have been tested, improved, and accepted. These new catalogs will be demonstrated to be economical in terms of production cost and maintenance time.

The more efficient the library's ordering, cataloging, and catalog production and maintenance systems become, the fewer the people required to run them. Technicians will be increasingly utilized for day to day systematic duties, especially in the areas of bibliographic verification and cataloging where they will have huge data bases from which to select needed information. Hence, in the eighties there will be a gradual shift of professional

personnel from cataloging and acquisitions to other library positions. This shift is already underway and may not level off until the only remaining technical processing librarians are a small cataloging staff, selection bibliographers, and managers. The remaining staff will be paraprofessional technicians and/or clerks.

There will always be a need for some original cataloging, but the cataloger of the future will have different perspectives in a new environment. With a gargantuan shared data base as the cataloger's primary tool, the quality of those data included will be a weighty concern. The final responsibility for the level of quality will rest with those that input, i.e. catalogers. Network standards will play a heightened role in quality control and will be taken more and more seriously as the complexity of the data base grows. The popularity of non-print media will require catalogers to diversify their descriptive cataloging expertise.

Traditional parochial views of cataloging designed for specific collections and local priorities will be overshadowed by standards for national and international sharing of information in a new and invigorating spirit of cooperation.

Technical processing librarians in administrative or managerial positions will have to understand and be conversant with the automated systems for which they hold responsibility. Though systems design and programming skills may not be required, the more expertise in these areas librarians have, the more flexibility and internal control for the library. Networks will

provide some of the needed technological expertise, but librarians should acquire it also--either through formal education or self-teaching and practical, on-the-job experience. Management skills will also be important, both in implementation and continuing operation of new systems in optimum conditions to maximum potential.

If costs of library materials continue to rise as expected, the collection development librarian of the eighties will have many difficult decisions to make. Restricted budgets will necessitate selectivity in acquisitions at a time when libraries will be pressured to acquire more materials in more formats, in more specialized areas than ever before. The collection librarian will have to balance fiscal concerns on the one hand and ideal collection goals on the other. Libraries' resources will perforce be redefined to include materials which are accessible through networks and not, in many cases, within libraries' own collections. Collection librarians will be key figures in library systems, charged with stretching tight budgets, maximizing cooperative acquisitions and resource sharing and, perhaps most importantly, persuading the library's clientele to accept its new strategies for providing service.

Another dimension may be added to the roles of collection librarians as they are tapped for specialized reference service in their particular subject strengths--another step bridging the ever-narrowing gap between public and technical divisions in libraries. The rationale for the dual collection development/reference assignment might be personnel economy for the library and concurrent maximum skills utilization as a benefit to patrons.

A final prediction has already been alluded to above and that is a steady movement toward de-emphasis of distinctions between library public and technical services. This blurring of traditional boundaries will result from two primary circumstances:

1) implementation of new and creative approaches to meeting library system goals juxtaposed with reduced funding and library reluctance to set fees for service;

2) a common bond established through reliance of all librarians, both public and technical, upon a central data base and an integrated automated library system.

If the forecast of professional position shifts out of cataloging and acquisitions departments proves accurate, many of these librarians will be moving to public service jobs and bringing with them their valuable technical experience. New enlightenment and understanding would surely be side benefits of transfers such as these.

In conclusion, one might describe future technical processing librarians as follows. They will be quality conscious in their cataloging, comfortable with computerization, specialists in subject bibliography and reference service, and skilled in management and budgeting. And though they may be fewer in number than at present, they will be supported by technicians and multifaceted automated systems. With all this to look forward to, the decade ahead promises to be challenging yet, ultimately, one full of rewards and satisfaction.

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